

# TWILIGHT in INDIA.

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COCANADA.





# TWILIGHT IN INDIA.

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## P R E F A C E .

These chapters do not claim unreserved acceptance in India or else-where. But they have been, in origin, meant for a wider hearing than under the great Himalayan range; they thus suffer between the common-place here, and possible obscurity there. To reach an International Free-thought Congress from the Indian Ocean is not easy. But the record of effort in the direction may set sail to the wind. It has been said that mere thought excelled textual study.

*(Jiganasurapi Yogasya Sabda Brahmati vartate :*  
[Gita, VI, 44.]

In this sense (of Jignasa) is the trinity of aspects of Indian life offered. These are meant to be factual, not poetic, and unhesitatingly critical of pretensions certitudes in the three essential realms of faith, society, and economic order.

The first chapter (Vishnu) deals with the background of Indian life, in the religious setting. Its length is justified by the antiquity of history. The second (Brahma) outlines the social picture, while the light and shade, the real flesh and blood are furnished by the political and economic disclosures made in the third.

Gandhiji enabled the Bharata-skeliton to survive the ravages of the Imperialist vulture (Rama-Bandhu). His hand-craft sustained the lank lean frame, the sunken cheek, and the hallow eyes of the starving peasant; he yet turns an unresponsive wheel of hard, wooden, fate. These pages presume to look ahead. India has hope. The



touch of Mahatmas is not spent in the past, nor limited in our time. When they prayed, India was thinking. When they commanded faith, India knew. When they taught to spin and weave in peace, India was already planning, and beginning to act.

It is the dialectical prospect of the India of tomorrow that counts truly.

Cocanada,  
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M. V. V. K. RANGACHARI.



**CHAPTER 1**

**THE TWILIGHT OF FAITH :**

**THE TEMPLE IN SOCIAL SCIENCE.**

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**ABSTRACT.**

Rooted in the reactions to Buddhism, the Hindu temple continues as the central unit of social life in India. Historically, Freethought had its best friend in Buddhism. Born in India, it went into exile. The South Indian Brahmin, Sankara, the Nambudri from Malabar, Ramanuja, the Tamil Brahmin and Madhwa, the Kanarese Brahmin, every one in turn helped to effect the divorce of Buddhism from the land of its birth.

Hinduism is not identical with any single creed or set of dogmas. It is the collectivisation of diverse beliefs and practices. The communal strata present divergent levels of capacity for abstract thought. But all conspired to counter against the un-Vedic caste-destroying Buddhist sociology.

Temple-history, like all other institutions, is related to social and economic forces. Its glory may be explained from natural causes. Hence, it is permissible to suggest means of utilising them for social, human purposes relevant in our time and conditions. The analogy between Church, Mosque and temple is intimate. Their force as central units of life round which communal thought rotates is still unspent.



Buddhism degenerated into installing graven images of the founder (Budha) for worship. The Hindu reply scored out the human feature, since God could not be imaged forth in human shape. Linga-worship (oval-shaped marble stone) came into vogue. Sankara's philosophy of an attributeless, unmodified Brahman was in keeping with Siva-worship. Beside bathing, fasting and penance, there were no sociological impulses associated with the Siva-Linga shrines. According to Sankara's Advaita Vedanta, the physical world was unreal illusion, Brahman being the sole reality of the character of Intelligence (pure consciousness). The thin veneer of Impersonal Divinity did not satisfy the social impulse of Ramanuja. He discovered a formula more in keeping with concrete life. His Visistadwaita philosophy (qualified Monism) lent a degree of reality to the physical universe. As a corollary, human service was restored into prominence (prapatti). The symbology inside the temple underwent corresponding change. The formless "Siva-Linga" gave place to the auspiciously-featured Vishnu, the four-armed, as if to sustain the revolt against the common-place human image of Buddha. Ramanuja extended the message to all irrespective of caste or sex. His movement resembled the origins of the early Christian movement, even as his theology ran parallel to Christianity. It was a social experiment to better physical conditions alongside of spiritual discipline. There was planned-solution to bread-problem, releasing human genius from the routine cares. The holy-kitchen was some form of rice-socialism. Private possessive instinct was discouraged. The temple food-service travelled further from mere religious



convention like Eucharistic symbology, and fulfilled a real social purpose. Where there was the temple, the private home became the bye-word for vacuity, empty of all store. It was an economic re-orientation, and from this flowed the social influence of the temple on all the concerns of life, birth, baptism, tonsure, sickness, marriage, and success in all undertakings. Socialised monastic mendicancy shorn of all pretensions to privilege was the ideal of the Vaishnava temple-state. Leaving aside superstition, we may yet build on these foundations in our day.



## CHAPTER I

# The Twilight of Faith :

## (THE TEMPLE IN SOCIAL SCIENCE)

Historically, freethought had its best friend in Buddhism. The period about the reign of Asoka had been the acme of Indian civilisation. Since then, it would have degenerated into dogma. Creeds and divisions set in. Buddha, the enlightened one, was deified. He became the God-Man, the Avatar (incarnation) of Vishnu, the central figure of the Hindu Trinitarian Pantheon. Stone-images were installed in worship for the followers of Buddha; but he had offended Hinduism having set at naught the authority of the sacred texts, the Vedas, and the rituals, and sacrifices enjoined therein. His humanism had threatened to supplant scriptural Dharma. He was great, Hinduism had to acknowledge the fact. It had to assimilate his teaching, in its own interest, to save itself from total eclipse, and to survive. The trick was done. His humanism became a chapter in Hindu thought. The wind was taken out of the Buddhist sail. Buddha was acclaimed as one among the ten incarnations of the Vedic deity, Vishnu. The reaction to Buddhistic images brought numerous temples into being. Siva and Vishnu, idols in metal and stone sprung up in every city and village on the banks of sacred rivers, in plains and on top of the hills. Agamas Tantras and Vedic mantras made a common cause, conspired to overthrow Buddhism in India. It was the work of centuries, not the revolt of a day. In fact some of our temples claim



antiquity beyond a thousand years. To-day, they continue for the most part as the central units of social life in the Hindu community. Rooted in the reactions to Buddhism, they have not failed to survive the impacts of the other two chief historical faiths: Christianity, and Islam. At each stage Hinduism went on assimilating, incorporating new doctrinal thought, or discovering that what seemed new in non-Hindu theology had been already contained in the all-comprehensive Veda. It only needed to interpret, comment, or expand what was already supposed to be rooted in the eternal Dharma, to bring into line with the exigencies of foreign influences that only too frequently impinged upon Hindu life. The rocky temple weathered all storms, because beneath the seeming conservatism of the Veda, there had always been the plastic genius for re-interpretation, revision, and re-discovery.

Who drove Buddhism out of India? Born in India, it is in exile. It spread north, into Tibet, China, eastward, into Burma, Siam, far to Japan, and south in Ceylon, it holds sway. An entire hemisphere, the orient, pays her homage even to-day, but not the land of her birth. Who did this, by what means? The south Indian Brahmin, once; twice, thrice, that is the answer. Sankara, the Nambudri Brahmin of Malabar, Ramanuja, the Tamil Brahmin, and Madhwa, the Kanarese Brahmin, each in his turn helped to effect the divorce of Buddhism from India. The centuries during which these three great teachers (Acharyas) lived saw the antithesis between Buddhism and Brahminism, and since then Hinduism survived through apparent synthesis.



In truth, Hinduism never was identical with any single creed or set of dogmas. It is not religion in the concrete sense. It is the collectivisation of diverse beliefs and practices. It has hymns to Indra, (rain-god) to Agni (fire-god) and the elements, the sky and the earth. It is animism. It has varied ritual, ceremony, and sacrifice. But it is a far cry from the killing of the buffalo, or the goat and sheep and fowl, to the sublime reaches of the Upanishadic Vedanta. The meaning of life, the relation of man and the universe, the origin and end of existence, have occupied the Hindu mind and drew forth the finest subtleties of theorising. The communal strata present different levels of capacity for abstract thought, and their outlook and practice differ as well. But to counter against the un-Vedic, cast-destroying Buddhist sociology, it was the south-Indian Brahmin that gave the lead.

It is not to plead for revivalism, that we enter into the historical evolution of the south-Indian temples. When we remember the social and economic forces that brought them into being, and gave them shape it may help not merely to relate their glory to natural causes, -for, by itself it would be poor solace-but suggest, however faint or meagre, the indication, some means of wielding their very presence for social human purposes relevant in our time and conditions. Here, the analogy of Church, Mosque and temple is very intimate. As units of social life, as centres around which communal thought rotates, their force is still unspent. In some degree at least, life travels along parallel lines even in widely distant lands and societies. Man mostly lives by analogy, through imitation, conscious or otherwise. The story



of the south-Indian temple has wider repercussions than are apparent. Its foundations lay deep in Buddhistic, Christian and Islamic episodes in human conquest; as much as to say, the rumblings tremours and earthquakes that disturb any historic monuments do not fail to affect or be affected by the rest of them.

Buddhistic Stupas, Viharas, and temples degenerated into erecting the graven image of meditation (the Buddha in Padmasana pose). The Hindu reply was first to negative the right of the human shape to worship. If the un-Vedic cult denied or ignored God, Sankaracharya affirmed His Existence on textual authority. But his metaphysical postulate of Brahman was featureless, attributeless, and above all qualities beside Existence, Knowledge, Bliss. The concept of the First Cause cannot be equated to human shape, and the divine symbolism was better expressed by "Linga", an unshaped oval marble mounted on the stone pedestal. It is a concession to the craving of the mass-mind for some concrete symbol that validly replaced the erstwhile cruel countenances of Kali, Durga, Boar, Lion, Ganesh &c, in lower animistic Hinduism, as also the recent emergence of stony Buddhas lost in contemplation.

The unshaped Siva-linga has not the fierce fiery feature of primitive peoples, nor has it descended to the human commonplace idol of sitting Buddha. Limbless, even as the empty sky shapeless like the good round earth Iswara rules in the temples of Chidambaram, Kalahasti, Bhimavaram Benares, Draksharam and a host of other places.



But the Advaitic reactions to Buddhistic decadence had not the human touch to sustain them for all time. Sankara took his stand on monistic idealism. God was Sat, Chit, Ananda, in essence pure Consciousness. The material universe was the product of a projected illusion simply (Maya.) It had no basis in concrete reality. The result of superimposition of non-existent (vivarta) on the Supreme Existence, Sat, like seeing the snake in the rope in deficient light, is *avidya* (nescience) ignorance to be battled against by divine knowledge. The all-perfect Brahman is beyond qualities, Nirguna, above attributes, Nirvisesha and not subject to modification, Nirvikara. He is unrelated to human contact, above the dualisms of pleasure-pain, virtue-vice, good-evil. It is an icy-cold, logically perfect 'metaphysical abstraction' wherefrom the limitations of finite human life and endeavour may in no way be derived. Its translation into uncut limbless stone-models in Shiva-shrines lent nothing but austerities, penances, bathings, fasts to the votary. If Sankara Philosophy remained the last word and the Siva-Linga worship was the only form of temple devotion, we should perhaps have missed some subtle sociological impulses in south Indian life.

The barbarous practices associated with the temples of primitive goddesses had fallen into disfavour. As vegetarian food replaced meat in enlightened society, animal sacrifices before idols ran out of order. The cessation of food-contact brought out a contrast between the Siva-shrine and the village-goddess that nourished the votaries on birds and beasts slain in numbers, as offerings. If Buddhism and Jainism helped to evolve a



finer instinct towards the dumb creation, and the higher reaches of Brahminism were obliged to take the lead from them, even from that cause, a point of contact of social basis was removed beyond the scope of temple-service. The Brahmin returned home from the temple, his body smeared with holy ashes externally, but otherwise more hungry than his humble comrade, who, though less lighted by the significance of OM (pranava) was nevertheless better off having shared from the sacrificial meat near the Durga shrine. The Siva temple was no place for thoughts about this world, like, food, shelter or marriage. Pilgrims swarmed into the recesses of the colossal structures, went round the Linga, poured water, offered flowers, and green leaves, donated from what little they carried in charity, and returned poorer if wiser-beings. Tradition did not associate the Siva temple with the solemnisation of marriages, perhaps because the God of destruction was not auspicious enough for such creative function. As if a perpetual reminder of the ultimate state of all physical coherence, the clan of Sivite worshippers powdered their frame with burnt ash. Uniquely philosophical, yet somehow religiously devotional, Sankara Acharya could sublimate his intellectualism of oneness with the Supreme (Adwaita) into a mode of worship of That (Tat) which did equal credit to any pious Durlist. But the temple under his care would have remained a mere place of worship, active only in some-other-worldly sense, but dull and unattractive from the social, earthly point of view. How it became an impressive factor in social economy is another chapter, the authorship whereof is traceable to Ramanujacharya.



Sankara to whom the external world was illusory could develop no collective ideology. His salvation was individualist, Vedantic perfection, oneness with Upanishadic Brahman. True, he countenanced worship of qualified Person, but that was avowedly on the lower plane, until the Nirgunopasana (the practice of apprehending the Impersonal Absolute) came within reach of the Sadhaka (practicant). He had no thought for the regimentation of Vedantic society on firm terrestrial material basis. Though he founded Maths throughout the land, and could provide rich endowments to perpetuate Peeths (positions) of the high-priests (Jagadgurus) that were to succeed him in his work, the emphasis was less on society, the collective physical well-being, while attention was more centred on individual discipline as the means of attaining oneness with God (adwaita siddhi), a position hardly compatible with the prolongation of life in comfort, in theory at least.

On the other hand, the formula "I am Brahman" (aham Brahmasmi) tended to lead in time to an overstressed egotism, from which it became necessary to lift the Hindu community. The Advaitic recipe "That thou art" (tatwamasi) tended to wipe out the instinct toward altruistic effort from the human breast. If myself and my neighbour are one, truly, the conception of such unity drives away discrimination and difference. As the basis for collectivisation, the formula "Tatwamasi" would prove very potent. If the whole universe were the expression of this simple identity, the need for marking off the self from the not-self does not arise. But the exigencies of actual life do involve the recognition of differences, distinctions between one self and another



between self and the world outside. Besides, the thin veneer of Impersonal Divinity unrelated to human well-being, did not satisfy the social impulse of Ramanuja. He strove to discover a formula more in keeping with concrete life, than the abstract logical Absolute of Sankara, a postulate that negated all physical existence altogether, resolving it in terms of Consciousness, somewhat after the manner of Mathematical Intelligence of Sir Jeans of to-day.

The Visistadwaita philosophy of Ramanuja lent reality to the physical world, which was recognised as a fraction (amsa) of the Supreme Being, Narayana. It was a life-satisfying ideology; not by way of abstraction, by getting away from the world, but by facing it squarely and well. The Absolute, though unconditioned, and infinite, is not devoid of attributes. Vishnu is the repository of beneficent qualities (Kalyana guna). This qualified Monism that recognised the physical existence rested on texts relied on by the predecessor Sankara himself (cf. padosya viswabhutani, Purusha Sukta and Ekamsena sthitho jagat, Gita, X, 42). The symbology inside the temple underwent a correspondingly parallel change. The formless "Linga" in this case gave place to the featured images of Vishnu, four-armed, with discus, shank, mace and sword, giving protection to the devotee, and of benign countenance, far different from the fierce dispositions of the more primitive craft. Architectural perfection and artistic taste have far advanced by his day. Temples were designed as places for perpetual resort for the masses, and vast stone-pillared halls accommodated crowds in thousands in all seasons. The flow-tide of temple-life increased vastly led by his



impulse. The inward looking formula "I am Brahman" (Aham Brahmsami) was substituted by the out-going Mantra "Om, Namō Narayanaya" which Ramanuja proclaimed in public. He answered the threat from his Guru (preceptor) that in having violated the secrecy of the Ashtakshari (eight-syllabled) mantra, he would be incurring sin, with the retort viz : it mattered little if one single offender paid the penalty so that millions might be saved by the publication. Thus, immediately after he got initiated, he broke the pledge of secrecy, and from the temple-spire he broadcast to the multitude. How like the challenge of Jesus to the erring world, he tried to convert the mass-mind to truth and devotion ? He swore by no orthodoxy. He extended the right to receive the message to all humans, regardless of sex and caste. He installed the images of Vaishnava saints who sang devotionally, some of them born in the lower castes, including the Pariah (outcaste). The Ramanuja movement began in every respect resembling the origins of the early Christian movement.

The human content of the Christian Trinitarian Godhead had, perhaps, by his time penetrated the Indian shores. Christ, the Son of God, the Father and yet One with Him ! The identity of the Hindu Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu, Siva and yet, Vishnu, the father of Brhama, and Brahma, the Pitamaha, ancestor of Siva ! The scheme of Christian salvation which elevated the human soul nearest to the Throne of God, in every respect resembling God, but not identical with or merged in Him has the corresponding concept in Vaishnava Moksha (liberation). These other-worldly fancies apart,



the social experiment of Ramanuja centred round the south Indian temple. With him, the temple became the unit of social organisation. To it flocked all the people for food, which was served on the collectivised basis, and the holy precincts laid the foundation of not spiritual elevation alone, but became the more primary bases for physical well-being. It was a well-planned solution of the bread-problem. The true Vaishnava was expected to give away his all, so far as private possessions could go. The complete social surrender implemented the abundant resources of the temple. Every skill, every form of labour, every craft worked for the shrine, and maintained itself sharing in its products. Literally God gave them the daily bread, and they lived, moved and had their being in the temple. To popularise rice-socialism, it was declared of special sanctity to partake of food offered to the deity. Within the temple, no caste scruple prevented orthodoxy from sharing the meals. Perhaps bread and wine transformed under Christian theology had their influence. Eucharistic symbology apart, the temple food-service travelled further from mere religious convention, and fulfilled a real social want and purpose. Human genius was released from the habit of the bread-winning care. Private provision became unnecessary. The Vaishnava home became the byword for empty vacuity, where no victuals lay in store.

To link human want with godly discipline, to discover that spirituality without food sounded hollow vanity, that is the contribution of the practical religion, Visishtadwaita. After several centuries, during which



the struggle between spirituality and secularism had gone on with indecisive emphasis, the economics of the private kitchen remains unsolved. The Parisian and Yankee hotel may cater to entire families the year round, and the soviet collectivised homes may have better organisation yet the formula for food-ordering is not finally concluded. To combat hunger and want, to socialise comfort, it remains the central fact of human endeavour, hunger which is first physical and economic, and spritual only in a secondary sense.

This economic re-orientation enabled Ramanuja to convert many a rich-endowed shrine to his persuasion. The mass-appeal was entirely in his favour. Motived by collectivistation, many a languished charity sprung into new life. Dedications of property flowed in largely from princes and rich land-lords. Srirangam, on the Cavery River, was the type of temple-polity. Built in within seven concentric squares, the city throbbed with life, in all its phases, to the wonder and admiration of millions of pilgrims that gathered to visit the central shrine, Ranganath, and partake from his Prasad (holy-food). It was the social pride that no home in the city-limits need have prepared its own food. And Ramanuja toured largely making innumerable shrines conform to his socio-religious order. Episodes in his career testify to the sagacity and economic foresight whereby he was enabled to bring several hostile institutions under his control. He could get over the obstinacy of the priest-hood through the larger humanity of his drive, and Tirupati, Sri Kurmam, Simhachelam, and a host of other centres fell under his reforming plan. It is said, he decided on the affiliation



of the temples sometimes relying on some supposed miracle, though it was often possible to explain the event on the basis of artificial achievement. But the cover of religious fervour did mostly the work of conversion, whose methods, like war and love, are always beyond reproach. Conflict once overcome, judgment followed in favour of religious merit, as a matter of course. The empty ash-trays of pilgrimage found new life, a new real service, that stood well by the side of the fatigued traveller abroad. The atmosphere in the temples was indeed mystifying, religious, and pious. The fumes of camphor burnt, and the dim lamp hardly revealed the art-beauty enshrined in the *Sanctum-sanctorem* but the prevailing spirit was collective service, intensely human, and appealed to the dumbest tongue. Superstition there was, not computable in pounds and dollars. But the standard of value in the days of Ramanuja gave credit to the communist kitchen in a sense similar to the soviet effort to eliminate the profit-motive in individual labour. The possibility of such construction of Ramanuja's teaching is not excluded, if it is remembered that one of the Alvars (saints, apostles), Tirumangaialwar, practiced looting private owners for public-feeding. He is alleged to have robbed even a newly wed divine spouse, symbolic, maybe, of the preference of human want to priestly, display, of idolatry.

Puri, the shrine of Jagannath that baffled the attempt of Ramanuja at conversion to south Indian Brahminism ran its own communist kitchen. The potters, artisans and labourers of the city gave all their services to the shrine, and got their entire food therefrom. Its caste-negation lay rooted in Buddhist history.



The religio-social economy of Vaishnavism was probably the heritage of some monastic order that latterly developed out of Buddhism. The Sannyasin (mendicant) according to Sankara's sociology resembled the Buddhist Bhikku in several details. The main contribution of Ramanuja lay in having incorporated monastic service in the daily work-a-day life, socialising mendicancy, after having annulled its claims to privilege, as a special Ashrama with spiritual pretensions. Jagannath (Puri) was probably both the bafflement and the inspiration to Ramanuja, in his cosmopolitan endeavour. While the Oriya Pandas refused to be taken in by his Tamilian affiliations, we have every reason to suppose that the shrine strengthened his humanistic conviction which found translation into temple-practice.

The unity of human legacy is indivisible, despite temporal forms and creeds. Whether one religion consciously imported the dogma or articles of faith from another may be subject to controversy. But the striking resemblances of observance and practice in Diverse communities have their lesson that the genius of the race is entire. Studying Vaishnavism & Christianity, I ventured on some sort of hypothesis, which by now is a decade old (See Mukundamala, 1928, Foreward, pp. 4-7) indicating close affinity between them. Ramanuja came later in historical sequence than the earlier Christian teaching. We may stop without pronouncing that he borrowed some of his theological notions and habits therefrom, although we may have evidence of Christian contact in India from a very early time. Nor is it against the grain of Hindu genius to assimilate all that is new in alien culture.



If Sankara took away the wind out of the Buddhist sail, may we not conjecture that Ramanuja extended the process to Christianity, as later, Madhva did similarly by the strictly monotheistic cult of Islam. The historic sequence is telling. The rigid non-condescending Allah who had nothing in common with man was compatible with stringent dualism. While the parallellism of the mystic three-in-one somehow humanly-related Christian Father-in-Heaven with Visishtadwaita is close. Consciously or otherwise, it enabled Hinduism to hold "all these things added".

Once the temple was recognised as social centre, its power and influence grew. It cured disease, by means of its baths, prayers, and fasts. Lourdes cured by miracle, and the temples and teerthas (bathing-ghats) claimed their number of cures. Offerings increased, and curious vows to grow hair until shearing in the sacred presence came into vogue. Spirituality rose in economic value, and shrines became centres for circulation of wealth, industrial products, of hard-bargaining beside holy instruction. The cities became small temple-states, with defined economic polity. They entered into all spheres of life, at all stages, from birth, initiation into school, baptism, (thread-ceremony) marriage, sickness, even death, had something to give to the temple. Prayers like saying mass for the peace of the departed soul are common. The practice of marrying couples inside the church found entry into the Vishnu temple. It extended the social utility of the shrine which helped to bridge the economic difficulties of an otherwise prolonged affair.



These amplifications of the social utility of the temple are links in the chain binding humanity to idolatrous symbology. But behind the symbol lay physical realities, human wants and satisfaction, economic grab and distribution. Even the food-dole turned mercenary soon after. God became the by-product of mammon. The supremacy of the economic instinct over the rest of life became patent.

Ramanuja also established Maths and ordained a succession of masters (gurus) to carry on the reformation. Many Ramunja-kutams (congregational homes) came also into existence. India has a network of the temples, Matts, and Kutams, and their influence upon the lives of millions is very considerable. Hard-pressed by Mleccha (Muslim) aggression, Ramanuja is said to have received service from the Panohamas (outcastes) for which he conceded the right to temple-worship to them in Melkote (Mysore) and a few other temples. It did not detract from orthodoxy in the least, and to this day the Pariah worship goes on, to schedule. It was a great wrench from the communal sense, which less-gifted leaders would shrink from venturing upon. If to-day the Harijan problem and temple-entry lift up side by side, and the curse of untouchability is so sorely fought, may we not understand the inner springs of social order, and the lines on which reform had been historically attempted?

Travancore leads, having thrown open her temples to Harjan entry. Indore issued the proclamation too. These are social victories in our time But there are



limits to these triumphs. We need to take humanity into confidence more than at any time before. None will be prepared to remain content at mere half-way houses to liberty and unfettered freedom. God's houses, man knows, were meant to provide for man. The massive thousand-pillared halls (Mantaps) have become the dark adode of bats, owls, and vipers, while millions of human destitutes stray about exposed to sun and rain. The social genius is yet to assert itself inaugurating fresh values restored to *Homo sapiens* as against the imperial calls of the rupee, pound, and dollar, to life, as against the dubious if not impertinent call of death, or after-life. To the merely secular rationalist, it is a sorry reflection to make that South Indian temple-history has not so far taken humanity fully into confidence. Prapatti (social service) was no doubt the watchword of Ramanuja. But even he did not hang his case entirely on the peg of life. There was a tinge of other-worldliness combined with his passion for humanity. It was mysticism linked with the notions of Karma prevalent in all Hindu philosophical literature.

If in our time, we can get over the fatalism of past Karma, if we have faith in conscious human direction, if we are assertive enough to translate our past devotions to gods and goddesses into active allegiance to human causes, may we start temple-life afresh, on sounder, saner, if not more holy foundations? The seeds of secular appeal are already there. It only needs the light of modern thought to penetrate those smoke screens of camphor and burnt ghee, of mysticism and superstition, to disclose their real



purpose, and meaning, **SERVICE OF HUMANITY**,  
the promotion of a better order of life, and its prolon-  
gation in comfort on this planet, rather than any other.

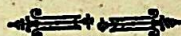




## CHAPTER II.

# The Social Twilight :

## FREETHOUGHT IN INDIA.



The story of Freethought in India is not long. The majority community is Hindu, with its temples and shrines, sacred rivers, and religious observance. The other large community, the Muslim, has little place for liberty of theological conviction. Mostly, birth determines our affiliations. If anything, the allegiances of conversion are even more rigorous than birth. The Christian communities draw mostly from the Catholic and other reactionary denominations; liberal and modern tendencies very rarely enter into the bargain. Whether in the temple, or the mosque, or inside the church, the outward garb of the paraphernalia of religion is more in evidence than the spirit that is supposed to have lain at bottom. The essentials of the original teachings, and the social surroundings in which they happened to have been given are often lost sight of, since the historical or scientific approach to religion is seldom attempted.

The Hindu orthodoxy continues to fight reform at every front. Entrenched in mass-ignorance and superstition, it easily enables the priestly Brahmin class to direct life along the age-old channels of custom and Shastras (ethical codes). Like the fundamentalists, the Pundits bring in the Word at each turn of the social drive. Idolatry is rampant. Caste rules. The



curse of untouchability is yet not removed. Girls are married in infancy. Women are not permitted to re-marry. Marriage is a Samskara, a religious sacrament, not a secular contract, and may in no case be rescinded or dissolved. Strict orthodox Hindu is debarred from travel on sea.

Some of these inhuman errors have been fought against during the last three-quarters of a century. Thanks to the efforts of pioneers like the late Raja Ram Mohun Roy, some of the bigotry and social injustice has begun to melt down. But it should be conceded that the march toward sanity and humanity is slow. Brahmoism indeed sought to liberalise religion, and social reform was attempted under the auspices of purified doctrine. The mystic theistic background informed all reformistic social endeavour. That was at once the strength and weakness of the reform movement started during the last century. The limitations of the theistic appeal are manifest. The tendency to read into it communal or, at least, sectional implications was bound to grow with time. Hence Brahmoism, which drew mostly from the Hindu element, which is numerically the largest element in the country, is suspect in Moslem and Christian quarters, while it has helped to build up yet another class alongside of the Hindu caste-system. The school started by Dayananda Saraswati, the Arya Samaj, is another breach in reformed religion, which sought to revive the authority of the Vedas, the original sacred texts, without regard to the later commentaries, Smritis. Theism, founded (or not) on scriptural authority, circled round reform, which on crippled



wing is unable to keep pace with time. Our political awakening was also retarded by the shortsighted social outlook. Gandhi recognised this, and set to work against untouchability, social injustice, and Hindu-Moslem antithesis. Temples are slowly opening the gates to the Harijan, a name which he began for the down-trodden Paraih, Panchama-outcaste. His efforts to resolve the communal tangle are well known in political circle. But even Gandhism as a social liberating force has not the dynamic of freethought. Mr. Gandhi is an avowed theist. A mystic, old-world-looking sensitive subjective personality, depending on inspiration, "inner sense," and divine guidance. He has no communal bias, and works for the regeneration of the masses, Hindu, Moslem, Christian, Parsee, Jew, and the rest. He is grieved over the communal clashes and that he has not been yet able to eliminate them. Behind his practical discipline, there is the anti-scientific trend of spiritual suggestion that marked all his social effort. He fasts, and says prayers, observes a day of silence in the week, refers to RamaRaj, and one hundred scriptural quotations from all creeds. His interest in precedent, and concern for authority verge on dogma. He is famed for spiritualising politics, and that is the true criticism of his national lead. He is the instrument of God, and there is much in him which is attractive for the defender of the Faith. In some degree interest in the maintenance of static order, approaches Gandhian philosophy. The tendency to idolise abstractions like truth, Satyagraha, and other virtues, carrying them to other-worldly merit, to get at absolutes in purity



and spirituality, to abandon, if need be, material benefits in favour of unproved idealistic preference, it is the express anti-naturalist propensity of Gandhism. True, the Mahatma often gave the correct lead in social and political movements, but he always rested his case upon Providence, rather than on human-plan. He has instilled collective action, but the means were inspiration, intuition, appeal to profound sentiment, rather than cold calculation, logical reasoning, or mechanical hypothesis. Mr. Gandhi today occupies the dictator's chair in India, which is not free in either side. We have secular leadership which is not yet prepared to travel from the philosophy of absolutism. Will India ever do it, I do not venture to answer.

Outside the Gandhian temple, the air is freer. Jawaharlal Nehru, Subas Chander Bose, and others there are many whose intuition has not out grown their reason. Dr. B. C. Roy, (Calcutta) and Dr. G. V. Deshmukh (Bombay) are avowed rationalists. The latter had been president of the Rationalist Association of India, which during the last decade has been keeping the flag of REASON flying, publishing the journal of that name. The prevalent tone in the country is Gandhian, but we have a less audible, yet none-the-less real undertone of a naturalist philosophy, a humanist, merely materialistic ideology. Leaving aside the Gandhian love of divine-disposition, even the Gandhian program is practically humanistic, though the theory is hardly consistent or rationalistic.

The experiment in Indian rationalism will continue to remain less promising so long as there is the



suspicion of communist inspiration in the air. Any scare "religion in danger" is likely to rouse Red associations, and in the peculiarly sensitive tension in politics, liberty of thought and expression suffers. Dialectical materialism, economic-planning, sociology to order, these are some wierd phrases that raise controvercial dust. But India is no isolate. Evolutionary change is bound to overtake the communities reacting to modern life. The spiritual outlook will one day be pierced through. It will be the work of expanding education. Already our universities and academies are realising the distance between idealist theorising, and the realities of life. We hear the echo of such realisation in our annual gatherings, Philosophical, Science, History, Economic, and other Congresses and conferences, where some plain-speaking may be had. The contributions of papers read subjects discussed, and proceedings recorded will prove the need for departure from the routine method of education employed till now. India pays homage to Vedanta and is eager to clutch at the intriguing pronouncements of mathematical philosophers like Sir Jeans and Prof. Eddington, who had recently been in the country at the Jubilee session of the Indian Science Congress held in Calcutta, early in the year. We have aptitude for obtuse speculation like relativity, in which Prof. Einstein is given good fight by Sir Shah Sulaiman. Our socialisitic and Marxist students seek to lay out plans suitable to our needs and limits, and names like M. N. Roy, J. Nehru connote seriousness of purpose, coupled with energy in accomplishment. Their furious thinking insures Indian life against the relapse into unreasoning stupor.



We have begun to realise that like the old-world Veda, the ability to recite fine phrases from text-books did no good to promote the organism. Neither the hair-splitting Upanishadic Vedanta, nor the quill-driving English college offer a fair solution. Industry is still in infancy, and technical skill low and very rare. That is not due to the absence of scientific genius altogether from the race, which has produced the late Sir J. C. Bose P. C. Ray, Sir C. V. Raman and other well known scientists of world-repute. But the distance from our tallest men to the average stature is a huge gap. Steeped in superstition, life in the villages which fills the greater portion of the Indian canvas is far removed from the scientific outlook. Renaissances there had been and there are, some of them reaching beyond communal or provincial limits. It should be confessed, however that none of these has singularly confined its basis to experience in life, as against the claims from some other quarter or external authority, textual or something else. Sometime there was the "Revolt", a journal that started with rationalist outlook for the self-respect movement, which has since gone communal. There is the Ezhva, and Ambedkar movement, which protests against caste-institution, and the corollary, out-caste community. Though the Brahmin is not so much in power now as once he was feared to have been acquiring, Brahminism itself, the system of caste-preference, of birth, and communal bias is not yet fully out of date.

Attention has been drawn to the main features of the pathetic and appalling story of the Indian picture by the one Hindu Honorary Associate of the R. P. A., Dr.



R. P. Paranjpye, in his book "The Cru<sup>x</sup> of the Indian Problem" which was issued in the Thinkers' Library, (Messrs Watts). Perhaps, India has not travelled long since the publication of his book, and his change from the India Office in London to the Vice-chancellorship of the Lucknow University. Even then, names like Karve, Dr. C. L. Davoine stand for robust, steadfast rationalism. Dr. D'avoine had once to stand even a criminal prosecution at the instance of the Bombay Government in defence of his anti-religious conviction, in which he scored triumphantly. As the editor of the journal "Reason," and at the control of the Rationalist Association of India, he and several others in Bombay and elsewhere are serving the "best of causes," as best they could. Dr. Deshmukh, the president of the R. A. I, is attacking from inside legislature many social injustices. His bills about female-inheritance open a fresh chapter in Hindu-law which he has succeeded in humanising.

There is yet a very wide field for freethought to cover in India. Indeed, rationalism has not travelled a few inches, where there are miles to go. But it will be far too pessimistic a view of human genius to take to deny that India will turn rationalist. In spite of avowed opposition to Atheism, agnosticism, materialism, and other names, the content of Indian thought is not unduly unsound. Words and names sometimes do create, trouble and confusion. But that is everywhere the case. One fact we should bear in mind. Just as the R. P. A. draws its membership from throughout the world, indicative of the universal appeal of reason, even so, Indian membership is not exclusive to one community, or to particular locality. The names that are printed in the



annual report are illustrative, by no means exhaustive. Throughout the length and breadth of this vast continent, that shelters over 350,000,000 lives, there is life pulsating, there is a new urge for quest, for free enquiry, and for knowledge first hand. Who can say that India will not turn rationalist, who keeps faith in the best brains among the living generations and those to follow?

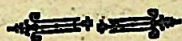




## CHAPTER III.

# Twilight, Political & Economic:

## The Struggle for Peace and Liberty.



Liberty and the Indian question are seldom put side by side in Britain. There is in the background a glimmer of satisfaction that Indian loyalty was cemented by the Act of Parliament (Government of India Act, 1935) and the belief is generally held that India has no reason to complain so soon after a substantial measure of self-government has been conferred. But the reform is very shadowy, and the entire continent is handicapped in many ways from participating as a free member in the British Commonwealth of Nations and enjoying those privileges which democratic states feel bound to ensure. In some degree, the British Indian Provinces have been made to experiment with a system of autonomy, which the Indian National Congress is seriously grappling. But even here, Indian Ministries suffer from the very narrow margins of finance available for nation building purposes, while the bulk of the revenue is consumed for Military and Defence expenditure, and the Central Government does not release much into Provincial Pockets. Besides, the pull from Whitehall, and Delhi, and sometime even the local representative of the Crown, the Governor, in whom are reserved large powers of interference, reminds the popularly-elected



Minister what a phantom of power he in reality wields. Nearly a third of the Indian population live directly under the rule of autocracies of the Princes. Consider a hundred million lives being lived in surroundings much resembling the prison. It will be pretty long before something like responsible administration springs into being in the Indian States. The subjects have no voice in the ordering of their governments, and in most of these, the method of election or the formation of legislature is unknown. They are in power, these princes, in virtue of the treaty-obligations entered into with the British Government during the times of their ancestors, and the paramount power resides in the Br. Crown. It advises and controls them through the Viceroy, who except in grave cases seldom steps in, on matters of internal administration.

Now the Government of India Act in the second part provides for the inauguration of a Federal System in the Central Administration in the country. Nationalist India opposes the scheme. The central legislature is to be composed of representatives of the British Indian Provinces and also members from the autocratic Indian States, and the voice of reactionary elements will predominate. There are more than five hundred States, and no method of gaining representation of these units will allow the free-mind of India to express itself, at Delhi. Even the election from the British Provinces has been provided only indirectly, and not through open popular franchise. These coupled with reservations and safeguards make responsibility at the centre a fake-production, which progressive India is pledged to fight in every civilised way.



The political and economic status of India is very remote from liberty, and no decent power is in our hand to correct the flaws, errors, even the gravest blunders of a dominating, crushing, administration. The picture of Greater India in which British Provinces will collaborate with the indigenous federal units of the Indian Princes does not raise any enthusiasm in a single quarter. The Congress, the largest political organisation in the country will fight Federation, in which all other true Indian interests will readily join. The princes themselves may have misgivings about their treaty-rights, preferences, and other peculiar considerations, and before they sign the instrument of accession they may wish to be circum-spect. But the final step in their case does not need cajoling, since it will become evident that their very existence in our time depended on protection given by the Imperial Crown; as against the march of the hungry crowd, the titled-heads can counter with nothing more than Paramount Protection. In the common interest of maintaining *status quo*, the Princes are bound to wheel round towards Federation.

The States-subjects declaim Federation which takes no note of their presence at all in the picture. Thus are their aspirations for fuller life thwarted, every attempt at the national struggle stifled, their leaders clapped in goal, and the demonstrations more often answered with gun-fire. The liquidation of the States is a common-sense solution, if some sort of homogeneity were to reach the 350,000,000 creatures walking on the Indian continent. There may be a thousand communities, speaking as many languages, divided by as many differences of culture or outlook, but the attainment of



political and economic unity would be hampered by none of them, provided the interests of the masses of the people alone are kept in the forefront. We lag behind liberty because there are vast interests pulling us down, grinding out life. Europe is gradually realising what it would be like to go under dictatorships, but India whose historic civilisation, geographic volume, or ethnological content compares more favourably with the entire western continent is to-day under the heels of unintelligent governors, and insensate autocracies. That is where liberty stands in India.

As for peace, thanks to the British bayonet, the sword of the Maharaja and the police-baton which has latterly incarnated into the lathi (a thick short bamboo club-stick) thanks to these and many others like aerial bombers in the background, India does enjoy quite a considerable quantity of that commodity called peace. This is more easy when entire populations are banned the use of arms, ammunition, or any weapon of offence or defence. In normal conditions, a wholesale prohibition of the use of all weapons is not conceivable anywhere else in the world beside the once heroic Bharata-Varsha. Skill, valour, and all the masculine traits of honour and fame are thus eliminated. The responsibilities of citizenship rarely enter into the mental horizon of a community which is cowed into submission, denied the opportunity to learn the martial arts, yet is dragged along impounded in ignorance and cowardice. It is a demoralising picture, that of British peace in India. And yet, even the peaceful grave-yard has its yells and shrieks, its ghosts and phantoms, and the cries from an after world.



The enforced silence is frequently interrupted by communal riots clashes and street-battles that mar the harmony of life. Digging beneath for the reason we often get at trifles which should set us reflecting on the light touch of the emotional machine in the human brain. Did ever music lead to man-slaughter? Yet in India it is literally true. Scores of lives lost and hundreds risked on this question of music before mosque. Where the house of prayer abuts the road, Moslem worship ought not to be disturbed by the other communities using the passage, leading processions with music. The Hindus are fanatically keen against cow-killing, which during Muhammedan feasts, e.g., Bakr-Id, leads to serious battles. It costs all the vigilance of the authorities to manage over these issues often fraught with fatal consequences. We cannot ordinarily understand how an article of food and meat, an animal like the cow or the pig, could divide human communities so seriously. These differences are not confined to up-country boorish villagers. A cosmopolitan city like Bombay witnessed more than once mortal unrest, because the bells in an adjacent Hindu temple under construction would disturb prayers in the nearby Mosque. Loss of life, loot, police-firing, arrests, curfew orders, military control, these are the incidents of communal, religious, fanatical strife, which is a chapter, a very real chapter of Indian administration. Whether in the Br. Indian Provinces, or in the Moslem States like Hyderabad, or in the Hindu States like Mysore, the use of force, in breach of the peace, and the use of counter-force to over-power the disturbing elements is unavoidable. Pledged to non-violence, the task of the Congress to ensure communal



unity is ever put to severe test. Many had been the occasions when Mr. Gandhi had to enter severe protest against the disuniting incidents tending to wreck the whole fabric of his social work. He prayed and fasted and leaders gathered, and regretted, somehow peace returned, but not assuredly a lasting peace.

The handicaps to liberty and peace in India will on analysis be traced to a fundamental evil. It is the exclusion of reason from those fields which should be informed and inspired thereby to best advantage. In the political field, differences have the knack of being exploited for the benefit of Imperialist domination. If Britain were to perpetuate her hold on India, the least line of resistance would be to support the subordinate yet powerful vested local interests. To yield real power, the substance of democratic Government into the hands of the Indian people might endanger British interests. The Indian Princes and the religious dictators together share between them the power and prestige that stifled all liberalising forces, and would act as the bulwark behind which Imperialist exploitation may remain securely entrenched. In the scheme of things obtaining at present mass-ignorance, religious bigotry, social differences, economic slavery, and political subjection are closely intertwined, inextricably inter-related, like the system of clogged wheels in the mechanism of a watch.

Religious communities do not observe the sane policy of "give and take" Live and let live, had been the guiding rule of Indian life for centuries yet, it is painful that to-day there should arise disturbances in the



tranquil lives of even the emasculated people. The mission of Freethought at this juncture of history is of prime importance. To usher in an era of liberation and peace, the instinct of toleration should be developed. The fundamental unity of human endeavour, despite communal divergences should be historically, scientifically, explored. The hollowness of preferences and holy pretences should be exposed. And the march of social evolution on naturalist basis, depending largely on economic forces must be widely explained. Indian Freethought to-day has to grapple with the problem from two sides. It has to counter the old-world orthodoxies in religion and social order. It has further to meet the menace of a new mysticism which, apart from the partial success of the political experiment threatens to endanger the normal development of a free society. We should prevent Gandhism from becoming rigid religion a creed that demanded blind submission.

We woke up against the glamour of the Lancashire and Manchester cotton fabrics. The discovery that foreign mills crippled our economic life led Mr. Gandhi to popularise hand-spinning. That was the road to self-sufficiency. The emphasis on cottage-industries can be understood on the realistic basis. The cotton trade-talks can be carried on in the earthly language. Alike, we had also forged the weapon of Satyagraha, of passive resistance, and also that fine flower of civilisation, Ahimsa non-violence. These are our poetic exaltations in the state of pathetic helplessness in which imperialist domination landed us. To seek out humanity in the opponent is not beyond reason. The argument by appeal to the better sense in man is the finest handiwork of reason



But there is a limit beyond which the appeal tends to lapse into blind prayer, even religious bigotry. The evil may not be near at hand, but it cannot be ignored that our sincere regard for an individual or cause may become overworked, installing idols in the place of well-understood ideals. Gandhism may even degenerate into dictatorship, if the flow of the national current is permitted to drift into uncritical channels.

The Gandhian disciple is already beginning to feel that the last word in social philosophy has been uttered. He is somewhat sure that he need not use his brains to weave out fresh formulae to the ever-varying conditions of modern life. He even frets that the entire world is not looking through the Gandhian spectacles. He resents the remotest suggestion that they may become old. He cannot understand that secular shrewdness may co-exist alongside of spiritual obscurantism. The error of imputing social, economic, even political success to spiritual helplessness cannot be overlooked in the Gandhian philosophy. The Gandhian approach to the Indian problem will stop at mysticism. If you ask how mass-regeneration will result, the Gandhian will reply that somehow God will do it. Freethought cannot afford to be satisfied with the answer. We hold that mystification of politics and procedure is not the final phase of social thought. Non-violence is good, is the best antidote against oppression, brutality, and insensate negation of fellow-feeling. But to clothe it with supposed spirituality, to name it "divine power" should still be misleading. Nations have recognised its utility in formal declarations like the Kellogg-Briand pact signed a decade ago. But in



the international sphere we know how it has been faring badly. The ideal to establish the rule of reason in international relations was visualised, and the desire to avoid the arbitrament of war for settling disputes was there. But national selfishness and greed predominate. Nations do not hesitate to violate life, and Abyssinia, China, Spain and other countries are victimised. It is an intriguing phenomenon in the international sphere that the Gandhian formula of non-violence, embodied in the pacifist pacts of the western world and directly related to the Buddhistic Ahimsa of Japan, and whose practicability in concrete life is demonstrated in some degree in India, should not have yet caught civilised imagination. Prophets there are who declare against the weakness inherent in human nature, who are loud to insist on the need for new religions, new philosophies and new outlooks coming into being. But it is not our frailties that require to be emphasized upon. They are there with all the emphasis of the jungle, they stare fearfully in our face, and we struggle hard to get away from them.

To soften life, to make it more worthwhile to live than to think of ridding ourselves of it, to try to make others as comfortable as lies in our power, that is the gift of the finer side of humanity, whether achieved in the name of Gods, Saints, Prophets or free-thinkers.

**M. V. V. K. Rangachari.**

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